

## Desmond (Graeme) Stevens 1949–2009



What can one say about the loss of a man who was absolutely irreplaceable? There was nobody like him and there will not be another in our hobby in our lifetime.

Desmond Graeme Stevens was born in Brisbane on 15 October, 1949. He and his sister Vicki were the only children of Desmond, a self-employed boot maker, and Helen.

Graeme attended Chermside State Primary School. He was an avid reader and as an eleven-year-old in Grade 7, always read the newspaper before school each day. Towards the end of his time there his eyesight deteriorated dramatically. He was subsequently diagnosed as having Eeles Disease for which there was no cure. It invariably affects only males and usually appears with the onset of puberty. The

condition is extremely rare, Graeme's being only the fifth case to be recorded in Australia at that time. He was a bright student, keen to study and with high grades, but by the time he had completed his Junior grades in 1964 at the Wavell Heights State High School he had lost the sight in his right eye. To further his education he studied and passed his 'Senior' by attending night classes at Kelvin Grove College.

Graeme was actively involved with the church all his life, and from age three his family always thought he would become a missionary. However in March 1966, with his good marks at school and the help of a friend in the church, he obtained a position as a Junior Clerk with his first and only employer, the Brisbane

City Council. In the ensuing years he worked in many departments but by 1970 he had lost the sight in both eyes and was declared legally blind, just three weeks before his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

During the next 19 months he attended the Annerley Replacement Centre where he learned to read and write Braille and was taught mobility with his white cane. Through the generosity of a private institution, he was put through a night course in radio and television production to prepare him for a return to the workforce. As a result he recommenced work in 1972, this time as a radio dispatcher. The daily journey to get to work involved taking two separate buses each way. When he retired in 2008, he had been with the Council 42½ years.

Graeme never considered that he had a handicap and anyone who knew him well could attest to the fact that he certainly didn't complain about anything. Not content to just sit around, he enrolled at Kangaroo Point College where he successfully completed a four-year night Diploma Course in Advertising.

He was intelligent, thoughtful and always had some ideas brewing and something on the go. For example, early on with a partially-sighted friend, he ran a DJ-for-Hire partnership. Later, when he became interested in numismatics, he set up and successfully ran the first few coin bourses held in Brisbane.

In 1975 Graeme and his future wife, Margaret, whom he had met through the church, began attending meetings of the Brisbane Branch of the Australian Numismatic Society and later that year he became a member. They married in 1976 and from their short union a daughter, Cheryl, was born. Graeme certainly caused

many to wonder as to how, or even why, a blind man would collect numismatic items. His collecting interests were extensive, but Australasian medals, medallions, tradesmen and commodity tokens, check pieces, and coins of the Philippines were his main areas of focus. Further, he had an extensive library which was strong in Queensland and Australian history.

Soon he became a valued committee person with above average organizational skills. He became the editor of the ANS Queensland Branch news bulletin and later the treasurer. His mother, Helen, helped him with these tasks. Graeme established the bookshop which he turned into a goldmine for the branch and went on to serve with distinction as its president, chairing the meetings totally unaided.

His funding escapades and successes are part of club folklore. As the club's PR man his ability and instinct have gained many a member and indeed kept others in the club who might otherwise have 'strayed'. His greatest asset was the telephone—Graeme loved to communicate and accordingly the size of his resultant phone bills is legendary. But his radio was also important to him, and he couldn't live without either his computer or watch, both of which talked to him.

Many were the topics discussed with his friends—sport, music, politics, and of course numismatics which was mostly about something he had 'seen' or his latest acquisition. Graeme's achievements were many, but in the many decades I knew him I cannot recall him ever saying, 'I did this', or 'I did that'.

Graeme, along with Terry Davidson and me, founded the Queensland Numismatic Society (QNS) in 1986, as a second numismatic society based in

Brisbane. In the ensuing years Graeme filled the various official positions in the QNS with distinction. Perhaps the bookshop, which provides members with medallion issues and printed material which he invariably sourced, is his lasting legacy.

Graeme was recognized for his achievements in numismatics with the Patron's Prize by the ANS Brisbane in 1979 and the President's Encouragement Award in 1981. In 1990, Graeme became the third recipient in the State to win the coveted Paul Simon Memorial Award.

In 2001, Graeme was one of 11 national recipients of the 'Shine on Brisbane Award', which was set up and administered by Rotary in recognition of 'outstanding community service'. In 2006, he received the prestigious L.J. Sanders Memorial White Cane Users' Award. Graeme joined the Aid for the Blind Society based at Fairfield, Brisbane, in 2000, became its Vice-President in 2003 and was its President at the time of his passing, on 27 July 2009.

On the day of his funeral at Aspley some 200 plus mourners gathered to remember him and to show the high regard

in which he was held—someone who had overcome the disability of blindness and achieved so much and in so doing touched the lives of so many and not just in numismatics. The service was conducted by the Rev. Alan Male, a personal friend whom Graeme had met as a result of his long association with Camp Cal (an organization run by the Church of Christ for young adults and young married groups).

A closing word from Graeme and a phrase I have often heard him utter .... 'Life is like a game of cards. You play the game with the cards you are dealt.' I am sure Graeme felt he had a full hand.

In summary, Graeme was like a gold standard for those of us who knew him as a friend. Just as the gold standard underpins our currency, so too was Graeme someone on whom we could rely and fall back on. To many of us Graeme remains irreplaceable and will be sorely missed.

George D Dean